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ABSTRACT

At present, the composition program at San Diego State is located in two departments. The Academic Skills Center offers pre-baccalaureate courses for basic writers and developmental ESL writers. The Department of English and Comparative Literature offers most of the required general education two-semester sequence, advanced composition courses, and a M.A. in English with a rhetoric specialization. Six faculty from Academic Skills and English have proposed a restructuring which would eliminate the current Academic Skills Center and place its faculty and curriculum in a new Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies along with the general education composition, advanced composition, and graduate rhetoric curriculum and faculty now in English. Memoranda written by English and Comparative Literature faculty who opposed the restructuring can be grouped into three categories: metaphors of emotional loss or deprivation, metaphors of diminishment, and metaphors of violence and brutalization. As the restructuring proceeds, metaphors of reconciliation might be substituted for metaphors of emotional loss, metaphors of mutual gain for metaphors of material loss, and metaphors of healing for metaphors of physical loss. (SAM)

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Metaphors for Creating a Department of Writing

At present, the composition program at San Diego State is located in two departments: the Academic Skills Center offers pre-baccalaureate courses for basic writers and developmental ESL student writers. The Department of English and Comparative Literature offers most of the required general education two-semester sequence, advanced composition courses, and a M.A. in English with a rhetoric specialization. Two other departments, Africana Studies and Mexican American Studies, offer several sections of composition courses equivalent to the GE sequence. Several departments across the campus offer their own discipline-specific upper-division writing-intensive courses for their majors. The academic skills courses are staffed by three tenured/tenure track faculty, several part-time and full-time temporary lecturers, and Graduate Teaching Associates. The GE courses in English are taught primarily by Graduate Teaching Associates, the upper-division courses by part-time faculty, and the graduate courses by tenured and tenure-track faculty.

Six faculty from Academic Skills and from English have proposed a restructuring which would eliminate the current Academic Skills Center and place its faculty and curriculum in a new Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies along with the GE composition, advanced composition, and graduate rhetoric curriculum and faculty now in English. The new department would

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develop an undergraduate minor in rhetoric and writing studies and a graduate degree in Rhetoric and Writing studies with specializations in allied disciplines such as literature and applied linguistics/ESL.

It is necessary to give a brief summary of the formal review process, because this process itself has been at issue throughout the proposal's review. At San Diego State, university governance policy outlines specific steps for creating a new department. A written proposal is reviewed by the following persons or groups in the following sequence: the Dean(s) of the affected college(s), an ad hoc committee of that college's faculty, the Dean's Advisory Committee, the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, the SDSU Senate Committee on ACADEMIC Planning and Policy, the Senate Committee on Academic Resources and Planning, the SDSU Senate as a whole, and finally the university president.

The proponents of the new department began this formal review process in October of 1990; the proposal was approved by the Senate Committee on Academic Planning and Policy just last Friday (March 1993)--one more committee and the Senate to go. As my summary of the process no doubt suggests, these multiple reviews have generated many texts discussing the pros and cons of the proposed change and expressing opinions about the review process itself. Much of this discourse has relied on metaphor to express feelings and attitudes.

Language shapes our reality; metaphorical language

structures our understanding of reality. Metaphor has both a normative, reinforcing aspect and an exploratory one; it is both a deviation and a confirmation; it challenges and it affirms. Some metaphors enable us to see aspects of the reality that the metaphor themselves have contributed to constructing. But there are two troublesome effects of metaphor: it obscures some aspects of experience and it explains more than it is intended to.

My analysis today will focus on metaphors used in memoranda written by members of the Department of English and Comparative Literature who opposed the proposed restructuring. The metaphors employed in written discussions of the proposal to create a Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies can be grouped into three main categories: metaphors of emotional loss or deprivation, metaphors of diminishment, and metaphors of violence and brutalization. I will list and discuss these metaphors in roughly the order in which they were employed over the two and a half years the proposal has been under discussion and review.

The first set of metaphors describe the existing Department of English and Comparative Literature as a social group and the proposed new department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies as an agent which will disrupt this social group, causing emotional and material loss and deprivation. Family metaphors figure academic department as home, department members as part of a (perhaps dysfunctional) family. Invoking the persuasive power of tradition, it has been asserted that "English departments usually have been <u>home</u> to composition programs." Composition's place in

this home is suggested by some of the other family metaphors: one writer identified the subject of the memo that stated his reasons for opposing the proposal "The Orphaning of Rhetoric." This writer apparently considers rhetoric a child; presumably literature is the parent in the departmental home. It is not clear who or what has caused the death of this parent and thereby orphaned rhetoric.

In one memo, a member of the English department wrote of "The divorce that is less or more than a divorce" and advised colleagues that "we should be thinking about seeking the best possible terms for ourselves in the coming divorce proceedings," likening the organizational or structural separation of composition and literature faculty and curricula to the breakup of a marriage--leaving his audience to speculate as to who is woman and who is man in this presumably heterosexual marriage.

Another metaphor of deprivation suggests that the department is not necessarily a family, though a progressive social group, asserting that "Isolation of rhetoric and writing from literary study is a step backward." All of these metaphors assume an equivalence between departmental structures and disciplinary identity and assert that separation of composition from department would result in psychological deprivation of rhetoric/composition, presumably because its identity depends upon its relationship to the rest of what currently constitutes English Studies. The use of these deprivation metaphors obscures the potential gains in terms of opportunity for community with

other disciplines if rhetoric and writing studies leaves its traditional departmental home.

Metaphors which characterize the establishment of the new department as a diminishment of the existing English department make up the second major group. This group of metaphors for changes in ownership and power, borrowed from business and politics, cast members of the English department and members of the proposed department as rivals for this ownership and power. One writer warns English department colleagues that this is the "wrong time for trading away our influence as a department within the college." Another admonishes that the English department must "resist someone's attempt to build hisr [sic] little empire out of ours." The creation of the new department has also been described as "the DRWS secession." The geopolitical metaphors used here identify the establishment of the new department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies as the agency by which the size and power of English department is diminished.

One of the favorite metaphors for the establishment of DRWS was "hostile takeover"--a description that was used several times in the memoranda I analyzed. This metaphor from business describes the academic department as a financial entity. The metaphorical language asserts that while the proposed change will result in emotional deprivation for composition and rhetoric, it will cause a loss of material and political power for the rest of the English department. Implicitly, this loss of power is a transferral of power to the new department.

The last major category of metaphors describe the effect of the creation of DRWS as violence and brutalization. In these metaphorical representations, the establishment of DRWS is the agency by which others do physical harm to the English and Comparative Literature department. A writer warns English department members that they must not "allow ourselves to be stampeded. . .into the stockyard future Dean Strand is intent on heading us toward," likening the faculty to cattle and the dean to a not very capable cowboy. In the same memo, this writer warns that establishment of DRWS "would result in the inevitable dismemberment of our department." A later memo asserts that "The fact that no fewer than nine departments university-wide suffered decapitation or near decapitation this year should make any faculty committee like AP&P loath to do to an academic department like English and Comparative Literature what Tom Day very nearly did--and may yet do--to those mentioned." These last two metaphors, which describe the English department as a body, carry a great deal of emotional freight. In this metaphorical victimization of the English Department, the victimizer, when named, is university governance--either senate committees or university administration.

There have been a few other metaphors employed which do not fit into any of the three major categories I've identified; but I can't resist repeating them here for their sheer imaginative power:

"Far from needing to learn anew how to manage the

> quickly receding past in university writing programs, whatever entity finally rises after the conflictual smoke has cleared in the College will have to be one that is geared to reading the future correctly, not to mention being able to hit the ground running at a time when the ground in question is both mortgaged to the hilt and undergoing wrenching tectonic shifts."

This leaves me with an image of the DRWS faculty as parachuting psychics on their way to foreclosure proceedings landing in the midst of an earthquake--it's all very Southern Californian and it's funny, but this apocalyptic metaphor expresses just how traumatic the prospect of the proposed changes is for some faculty.

Another memorandum warns,

> "This business is not going to go away folks; it will at best hibernate for awhile before more craving for the honey pot sends it barreling out of its cave again."

Given the reference to the "honey pot," I imagine this honey-hungry (or was that money hungry?) creature not as a wild bear, but as Winnie the Pooh.

All of these metaphors characterize the proposed change in terms of loss--emotional loss, material and political loss, or physical loss. Though some of this language has its amusing aspects, it reflects just how difficult the proposed change will be for many members of the English department to accept, and it

must be taken seriously.

At this point, I could suggest that proponents of the organizational separation of writing courses and faculty from literature courses and faculty try to introduce new metaphors. Metaphors of reconciliation might be substituted for metaphors of emotional loss, metaphors of mutual gain substituted for metaphors of material loss; and metaphors of healing for metaphors of physical loss. The metaphors of "reconciliation," "mutual gain," and "healing" are powerful and appealing to people involved in troubled relationships.

But the problem with these substitute metaphors is that they reinforce the underlying material metaphor of gain and loss. A better suited cluster of metaphors for change suggest evolution and maturation: "emergence," "birth," and "leaving the nest." But the metaphor that has seemed to be most fitting for describing our experience of proposing the DRWS and seeing it through the various stages of the review process was suggested in our college dean's observation that we have "embark[ed] on a journey." Wherever this journey ultimately takes us, we have seen and heard and learned much along the way.